The very size of the country militates against unity. Nowhere else has any group of mankind succeeded for so long a time as have the Chinese in holding together under a single rule so large a section of the earth. The Roman and Spanish empires did not endure for as many centuries. The extensive domains ruled by the Persians, Alexander, the Arabs, the Mongols, and the Turks broke apart, at most after a few hundred years. China, in spite of periodic internal disruption and occasional conquests by foreigners, has continued. Of the modern empires, with the railroad, the steamship, and the telegraph to tie them together, only five—the British, the Russian, the French, the American, and the Brazilian—surpass it in area, and only one, the British, is more populous. Europe west of Russia, an area not far from the size of China proper, has never been politically unified and is split into many tongues and states. It is not surprising, therefore, that provincial feeling runs high, that much more power has been wielded by local and sectional and provincial governments, the clan, and the guild than in some highly centralized modern states, and that from time to time the country has been politically divided.

Moreover, variations in climate and in physical surroundings favor a certain diversity in culture and in national characteristics. Some of these have been stated earlier. It must be added that the Chinese of the North are more stolid and conservative than those of the South. This is probably due in part to a difference in blood, but it may also be ascribed to the famines which, because of drought and flood, have periodically devastated the North.

The phlegmatic seem better adapted to surviving times of prolonged dearth, and the highly strung and energetic who do not perish apparently are inclined to migrate to regions of less forbidding climate. Through the centuries, therefore, this selective process may well have produced a variation in type. Differences in the staple grains are accompanied by divergences in tillage. Domestic animals vary, donkeys and mules being characteristic of the North and the water buffalo of the Yangtze Valley and the South. Probably allied to this is the fact that in the North freight is moved partly by carts, and elsewhere by river, canal, and wheelbarrow, and that in the North roads and streets are broad and adapted to the wagon, the cart, and horses and that in the South